Gender Respect Project Scoping Study Summary of Report

http://genderrespect2013.wordpress.com/

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The full Scoping Study Report is available at http://genderrespect2013. wordpress.com/about/

Aims

The Gender Respect Project carries assumptions that children and young people in South Yorkshire are affected by a culture with prescribed gender roles which may limit experiences and aspirations. Focusing on the three primary and three secondary schools that were part of the project in 2013–2014, the scoping study for the project set out to examine this assumption and elaborate the range and diversity of perceptions that exist. The research stemmed from a curiosity as to whether there is a wide range of perceptions across ages, sexes and settings, or whether there are patterns related to age or sex or settings that emerge. The research aimed to explore three questions:

a)   How children and young people in our project schools in South Yorkshire perceive expectations on themselves and other children for being a girl or being a boy (gender roles including sport and PE; body image and appearance; popularity and respect; emotional expression; occupations and aspirations) and what they identify as influences on these perceptions;

b)   How they experience friendships and relationships between boys and girls;

c)   Whether they see any restrictions or unfairness because of their gender and what these restrictions may be.

Methodology

Randomly selected, small, single-sex groups of students from each of the schools were interviewed using pictures as a prompt for discussion, with questions covering gender roles (including sport/PE, occupations, expression of emotions and body image), relationships between girls and boys and perceptions of fairness or unfairness. In total 50 students were interviewed across the age range 7 to 14. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were transcribed and analysed. Virtually all the students were interested and engaged in discussing these issues.

Findings and recommendations

The majority of the children and young people in our study, aged 7 to 14, were acutely aware of gender roles and gender expectations on them. This was particularly expressed in sport for the younger age group (with different attributions for boys and girls) and in aspirations for all the age groups. This trend held throughout school settings. In other areas such as relationships, there were marked differences between schools, suggestive of school ethos and/or teacher/curriculum influence.

Experiences of different treatment and feelings of this being unfair

were most pronounced at primary age and felt more by girls than boys.

As the sample was very small and responses may be particular to different localities it is not possible to make generalisations from this study about other students elsewhere. However what the students had to say was interesting and significant in its own right. It would be revealing to see this study or similar ones replicated with other groups of students in other schools both in the UK and in other countries.

The following recommendations are for the schools involved in the Gender Respect project although they may also apply to schools beyond the project. Rather than merely pointing out areas where the findings indicate intervention is required, the recommendations make the assumption that gender equality and respect is something that schools have an impact upon, and draw on the researchers' pedagogic knowledge and experience beyond the scoping study to make suggestions about appropriate and effective methods of intervening.

Gender Roles: Sport & PE

Key findings:
- The majority of primary students said that boys were better at football than girls
- Boys mainly attributed this difference to intrinsic ability
- Girls mainly attributed this difference to exclusion and teasing by the boys
- None of the girls said that they were not interested in football
- There was a range of views across the different secondary schools which seemed to depend on school policies and ethos

> **'boys are always saying that girls aren't very good (at football) but we might be good'** (girl, aged 9)

Recommendations:
- Actively intervene in the primary schools to ensure all children have equal access to all sports, particularly focusing on preventing girls from being excluded from football by boys
- In the primary schools, actively challenge gender stereotypes in sport through role models and discussion
- In the secondary schools, explore the impact of whole school policy and practice on PE and sport

Photo credit: Sarah Jones

Gender Roles:
Body Image & Appearance

Photo credit: Mortz Petersen

Key findings:

Primary
- The girls and boys seemed to care equally about their appearance with the boys not afraid to say so
- There was some evidence of concern by girls over their body weight and muscle definition

Secondary
- Body weight and muscle definition seemed to be an issue particularly for the girls
- Much more recognition of the influence of the media and pop culture on appearance, particularly by girls
- No evidence with these students of 'sexualisation' of girls from influence of pop videos, more a rejection of this (particularly strong negative feelings towards Miley Cyrus)
- Evidence of a careful 'policing' of appearance by the girls
- Clear division of girls, in one school, into 'girly girls' and 'sporty girls'

'You should wear that amount of make-up instead of going over the top and looking like a tart' (girl, aged 12)

Recommendations (body image and appearance):

- Continue to be aware about the concern some children and young people, particularly girls, feel about body weight
- Continue to develop and use curriculum activities and materials which develop media literacy and a critical awareness of the influences of the media on perceptions of body image
- Give students the opportunity to discuss the historical and geographical contexts of how bodies are presented, including notions of 'beauty'
- Continue to use and develop PSHE activities and materials which support children's and young people's self esteem and help them to resist the pressure to conform to others' ideas of how they should look

Gender Roles:
Popularity and Respect (secondary only)

'If you're attractive and had attitude then you might be popular' (boy aged 12, talking about girls)

Photo credit: Biswarup Ganguly

Key findings:
- Most boys thought that appearance and being sporty or strong would make them popular
- None of the boys thought that being clever would make them popular
- Having 'attitude' was important for popularity of boys and girls in one of the schools
- Boys and girls thought that appearance was important for popularity for girls although the girls had a more nuanced understanding of how to gain popularity

- There were fewer responses about respect, indicating perhaps that this wasn't something that they had considered very much, or that it wasn't as important as popularity
- Girls and boys both said that studying hard could make you respected although being 'big-headed' would not
- Boys mentioned gaining respect of peers through winning fights and 'sticking up for your mates'

Recommendations (popularity and respect):

- Engage students in critically reflecting on what constitutes popularity in their schools and how this restricts or supports their performance of gender identities and attitudes to learning
- Engage students in critically reflecting on the nature of respect and how it operates

Gender Roles: Expression of Emotions

Key findings:

- The majority of students (girls and boys) thought it was OK for men to cry
- Some students thought that it was not normal to see men cry and that it could provoke teasing
- A few of the boys (primary and secondary) expressed disapproval about men crying
- There were many fewer responses to women getting angry

'It would be weird to not cry with sad stuff' 'It's nothing to be embarrassed about' (boys aged 9 about men crying)

Recommendations:

- Continue work in PSHE and SEAL in primary and secondary schools on emotional literacy while ensuring that students know that all emotions are available to and can be expressed by both men and women

Gender Roles: Occupations and Aspirations

Key findings:

- Students at all three primary schools and one of the secondary schools said that it wasn't 'normal' for women to be builders or electricians and men to do childcare or sewing

Photo credit: Scott Feldstein

- More girls than boys thought that it was positive to see women being builders or electricians and men doing childcare or sewing
- Most of the boys at two of the inner city primary schools (and one boy in a suburban school in a wealthy area) were very concerned for the safety of women and many of the girls from all six schools thought women wouldn't be as capable as men or have the strength required for jobs such as builders or electricians
- Several boys gave counter- arguments from their own experiences of women showing strength or engaged in occupations such as piloting aeroplanes
- Students' future aspirations were very gender-stereotyped with only doctor and police officer mentioned by both boys and girls
- Only nine girls compared to 14 boys chose occupations relating to STEM and of those eight were in caring

professions whereas only three of the boys choices could be seen as involving caring roles

> **'He's doing work and women cant do the work as well because they might electrocute themselves but men are much stronger and they can do it'**
> (boy, aged 7)

Recommendations

- Engage students in critically reflecting on gender stereotypes in relation to professions and occupations
- Provide role models and examples of men and women in counter-stereotypical roles including direct experience of people in different professions and occupations
- Provide more careers education to ensure that all students are aware of the range of professions and occupations that exist beyond their immediate experience

> **'I disagree with ... because some women do pilot jobs. once I went to my country and saw women driving the aeroplanes'** (boy, aged 9)

Photo credit: Lucelia Ribeiro

Relationships

Key findings:

Primary
- Majority of girls in the primary schools mentioned teasing or negative behaviour by boys towards them, some talking at length about this
- Boys also mentioned it and even showed negative attitudes towards the girls in their class during the interviews
- Several primary children wished for better relationships
- Many mentioned difficulty of being just friends without being teased about being girlfriends or boyfriends.

> **'Most boys don't want to play with girls, and boys and girls don't like playing together...boys in class they don't go anywhere near girls... they'll just ignore the girls'**
> (girl, aged 9)

Secondary
- Where same-sex relationships were discussed (secondary schools) there was a mixed response, with some students being very positive or accepting and others critical or uncomfortable. This tended to cluster in different schools, but more investigations would need to be carried out to ascertain whether this was owing to school ethos / teaching or background of students

> **'If you're going to do it in public it takes a lot of courage to come out and say you're being a lesbian and you like girls'** (boy, aged 14)

Recommendations (relationships)

- Find ways of improving the relationships between girls and boys in primary schools and continue this work into secondary
- Ensure guidance on LGBT equality is proactively implemented in all primary and secondary schools and that students are given the opportunity to explore and challenge their assumptions, prejudices and beliefs

Perception of Fairness

'Most boys are normally, people think they're quite naughty, so I think people would expect me to be good' (girl, aged 7)

Photo credit: Woodleywonderworks

Key findings:

Primary
- In each of the primary schools there was some mention of unfairness in the ways boys or girls are treated by adults in school
- Pupils perceived that it is mostly boys who get into trouble and display bad behaviour
- Some girls didn't like that they were expected to be good
- A few boys wished that everyone was treated equally and felt that they were restricted by gender stereotyping
- A few of the girls wished that boys wouldn't get so much attention
- In one of the schools the boys gave several examples of how they were treated differently outside of school

Secondary

- Lack of fairness was not perceived to be an issue in the two secondary schools where this question was asked directly
- In the third secondary school, mention was made by two of the girls about boys being treated differently owing to their reputation for bad behaviour

Recommendations (perception of fairness)

- Investigate whether the primary students' perceptions of unequal treatment of boys and girls in school is grounded in reality, in which case develop interventions to tackle this. If the students' perceptions are not grounded in reality then the perceptions need to be challenged
- Give all students the opportunity to engage in exploring the issue of fairness in relation to their experiences of gender roles and relationships

Recommendations stemming from the study taken as a whole:

The researchers were struck by the strong engagement of both girls and boys in discussing gender issues in their lives during the scoping study. The following recommendations stem from this experience:

- Give children and young people more opportunity to engage in dialogue about gender issues which they see as important and relevant
- Engage boys as well as girls in discussing gender equality and masculinities as well as femininities
- Use Philosophy for Children (P4C) and other methods using dialogic learning approaches which are valuable for engaging children and young people in discussion and developing their skills and aptitudes to be able to tackle controversial issues

> **'I like it because you asked us questions and you can really think about what you want to do and normally you don't think about things'** (boy, aged 9, talking about the interviews)

Photo credit: Ann Hamblen